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BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto no 5 in E flat, The Emperor

Cyprien Katsaris, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Neville Marriner. Piano Concerto no 5 in E flat, The Emperor, arranged for piano solo by Katsaris.

Piano 21 label P21051N (75.35)

Cyprien Katsaris is a French-Cypriot pianist born in Marseilles in 1951, who studied at the Paris Conservatoire. He has recorded the Beethoven symphonies in the piano transcriptions by Liszt, music of Bach, Mozart, Chopin, Grieg, Bortkiewicz, Schubert, Schumann, Russian and French music, Scriabin and Theodorakis. These are now on his own label Piano 21 which he created in 2001.



This recording is dedicated to the memory of his mother, Niki, who introduced him to this concerto as played by Horowitz and the RCA Victor orchestra conducted by Reiner.

I have known and loved this concerto for 50 years and eagerly awaited to hear this performance but I was disappointed. The piano is too prominent and the piano tone is troublesome. The playing is eccentric and the music does not breathe and the orchestra sometimes seems to be in another studio. There is not the grace and spaciousness essential to Beethoven the master. It sounds like the final sprint of the 2.30 at Newmarket. It is technical rather than musical.

Why does anyone want to transcribe this concerto for solo piano ? It is a concerto for piano and orchestra and the orchestral colours are essential. Transcriptions can be a nuisance. This very morning we had a broadcast of Milhaud's Scaramouch for two pianos played on the guitar which was so lacking and thoroughly inadequate.

The first movement of The Emperor for solo piano is often so fast that it borders on the ridiculous. This arrangement is a curiosity but it does not work. It is flashy and vulgar, clangy and unacceptable. My, doesn't the piano get banged! The speeds make it a messy jumble and music must not be delegated to mere technique and gymnastics. Some of the big chords are blasted out like explosives. There are many extra notes and so the music is often not Beethoven at all but a travesty. And there is no finesse.

I certainly do not want to hear this again and cannot recommend it. It clearly endorses my dislike of transcriptions which view very many other professional musicians share with me. Music should be played as written by the composer. Interpretation is realising what the composer wrote not freedom to alter anything or add or subtract top what the composer wrote.

If people cannot, or will not, play what is written they should not play it at all.

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